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Drama
Second Stage
Introduction to the One-Act Play

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One-Act Play: Full Explanation

Definition

A **One-Act Play** is a short dramatic work consisting of **only one act**. It presents a **single situation or conflict**, takes place in a **limited time and space**, and moves quickly toward a conclusion. Unlike full-length plays, it does not have multiple acts or subplots.

Origin and Development

The one-act play became popular in the **late 19th and early 20th centuries** with the rise of **modern drama**. It developed as playwrights sought more **realistic, symbolic, and experimental forms** of drama. The growth of small theaters and drama festivals also encouraged short plays.

Important contributors include:

- Anton Chekhov
- George Bernard Shaw
- J. M. Synge
- Samuel Beckett
- Harold Pinter

Characteristics of the One-Act Play

1. Single Act

The play is written and performed in **one continuous act** without intervals.

2. Limited Duration

Usually lasts between **10 and 60 minutes**, emphasizing conciseness.

3. Unity of Action

Focuses on **one main event or conflict** with no subplots.

4. Few Characters

Typically involves **a small number of characters**, each essential to the story.

5. Single Setting

The entire action occurs in **one place**, reinforcing dramatic unity.

6. Immediate Beginning

The play often begins **in the middle of the action**, avoiding lengthy exposition.

7. Strong or Surprise Ending

Ends with a **twist, revelation, or open ending** that leaves a strong impression.

Elements of a One-Act Play

Plot

- Simple and compact
- Rapid development
- Direct movement toward the climax

Characters

- Limited in number
- Clearly defined
- Serve a specific dramatic purpose

Dialogue

- Precise and economical
- Reveals character and conflict
- Avoids unnecessary detail

Conflict

The core of the play. It may be:

- **Internal** (within a character)
- **External** (between characters or with society)

Theme

Focuses on **one central idea**, such as:

- Loneliness
 - Power and authority
 - Absurdity of life
 - Social injustice
 - Human suffering
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Types of One-Act Plays

- Tragedy
 - Comedy
 - Farce
 - Symbolic drama
 - Absurd drama
 - Social or political plays
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Importance of the One-Act Play

- Economical in production
 - Ideal for festivals and academic settings
 - Highlights **intensity and depth rather than length**
 - Encourages experimental and modern dramatic techniques
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Difference Between One-Act Play and Full-Length Play

One-Act Play Full-Length Play

One act only Several acts

Short duration Long duration

Single conflict Multiple conflicts

Few characters Many characters

One setting Multiple settings

Conclusion

The one-act play is a powerful dramatic form that emphasizes **brevity, focus, and impact**. By concentrating on a single moment of human experience, it delivers a strong emotional or intellectual message in a short time, making it a vital part of modern drama.

If you want, I can:

- Turn this into **exam-ready answers**
- Provide **examples of famous one-act plays**
- Explain it **with quotations**
- Compare it with **modern or absurd drama**

Introduction to the One-Act Play

The **one-act play** is a modern dramatic form that consists of a **single act** and presents a complete story within a short period of time. Unlike full-length plays, it does not include multiple acts or complex subplots; instead, it focuses on **one central situation or conflict**. The action usually takes place in **one setting** and involves **a limited number of characters**, which allows for intensity and concentration.

The one-act play became prominent in the **late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries** with the development of modern drama. Playwrights adopted this form to express realistic, symbolic, and experimental ideas more effectively. Due to its brevity and strong

impact, the one-act play is widely used in **theatre festivals, educational institutions, and modern theatre.**

In essence, the one-act play emphasizes **economy of structure, unity of action, and dramatic effectiveness**, making it one of the most important and influential forms of modern drama.